

ReImagine Washtenaw Corridor Improvement Study

Frequently Asked Questions:

Question #1

Why is the City of Ann Arbor being asked to adopt the Corridor Improvement Study?

Answer: The City of Ann Arbor is a critical partner in the ReImagine Washtenaw coalition, which also includes Pittsfield and Ypsilanti Townships, and the City of Ypsilanti. The ReImagine Washtenaw collaboration is a success story in focused, regional cooperation, with a clearly defined purpose for significant economic and quality of life enhancements for the corridor. The project moved from vision to implementation with the projects funded by a HUD Sustainable Communities Challenge Grant over the last 3 years, and, in particular, the Corridor Improvement Study. In order to maintain a cohesive partnership and ensure that future improvements to the roadway are consistent among all four jurisdictions, all four local unit of government partners, and Washtenaw County, are being asked to adopt or approve the Study. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) may be less inclined to endorse the Study if a critical partner declines to adopt it.

Question #2

Why is it important that MDOT endorse the study?

Answer: Washtenaw Avenue is owned by MDOT. MDOT representatives were involved at every stage of development of the Corridor Improvement Study, and advised the project team on matters such as proposed lane width, modeling, and different cross-section alternatives being considered. In order to have this plan to be incorporated in MDOT's transportation improvement plans, it must be in agreement with and endorse the general concepts in the Study. Nonetheless, MDOT will require more detailed transportation analysis on a project by project basis, prior to any significant corridor changes.

Question #3

If the City of Ann Arbor adopts the study, won't it require the City to build the improvements contained in it?

Answer: No. The primary purpose of the study was to develop future Complete Street roadway cross sections that would safely incorporate multiple modes of transportation, analyze other corridor enhancements, such as signal timing changes and boulevards, and simultaneously improve or not inhibit flow of vehicular traffic. The full deployment of the recommendations, which include a boulevard, is planned to help reduce traffic congestion by allowing traffic to flow more efficiently through intersections. In addition, the public access that would be required in the future to achieve those cross sections was determined. By using transportation modeling with the most current traffic and land use information, various roadway cross-sections were tested to arrive at designs that achieved a multi-

modal street, while continuing to move traffic. By adopting this Study, the City of Ann Arbor is reaffirming its commitment to the ReImagine Washtenaw regional collaboration, and to continue to advance changes along the corridor that are aligned with the Study. The changes will be implemented incrementally, with additional required public access acquired during the land use review process as properties are proposed for redevelopment.

Question #4

If the City of Ann Arbor adopts the Study, will it mean the City or MDOT can then legally start taking adjacent property using eminent domain to expand the roadway?

Answer: No. The City and Michigan Department of Transportation already have inherent powers of eminent domain to advance a public purpose such as highway or road expansion. This Study does not bestow any additional powers in that regard, nor does the Study call for the City or MDOT to take property to make improvements. Page 78 of the Study, in Section 6, Implementation, clearly states the intent to assemble necessary public access as property redevelops.

Question #5

Will the proposed wide boulevards make it more difficult to access adjacent businesses?

Answer: The proposed boulevards allow indirect left turns (Michigan lefts), similar to Jackson Road or South State Street near Briarwood. While direct left turns will be restricted, vehicles will be able to proceed past their destination, make an indirect left turn, and then head back to reach their destination. Some intersections must still allow limited direct left turns, as part of the modeling conducted with this Study (e.g., Huron Parkway). The benefits to the corridor are substantial: 1) Increased pedestrian safety with a boulevard refuge at each crossing, reduced serious collisions, and a significant increase in performance of signalized intersections due to the elimination or reduction of direct left turning movements permitted. While slightly more inconvenient to directly access adjacent land uses, traffic will move more smoothly and improve the overall function of the corridor, which will be good for adjacent businesses. As part of the modeling done with this Study, direct left-hand turns are still maintained from northbound and southbound Huron Parkway onto Washtenaw Avenue.

Question #6

It seems that the Corridor Improvement Study lacked adequate public and business outreach and participation. Why wasn't the business community informed of the plans for the corridor?

It is the intent of every planning process to involve those that would be impacted most, and those whose input should be considered and would be useful. The Corridor Improvement Study included significant public outreach. There were four public workshops scheduled at different times of the day, in order to maximize participation by business owners and residents, alike. Over 200 people attended the workshops, and an additional 75 people responded to the online presentation and survey of the workshop material. In addition, a Washtenaw Avenue Merchants Association (WAMA) was formed

during this process, facilitated by the Chamber of Commerce, City Planning Staff, and the ReImagine Washtenaw Project Manager. A specific invitation was made to the business and property owners involved with WAMA to participate in the public engagement workshops and development process for the Study via email on May 3, 2013. A follow-up email invitation was extended to WAMA members on June 13, 2013 to participate in the online feedback forum, for those that may have missed the public forums.

Question #7

What is overall “price tag” to fully build the vision for the corridor?

Answer: The Study scope did not include a detailed cost estimate. Although detailed cross-sections of each section of the roadway are provided, the primary purpose of the Study was to provide a comprehensive “road map” for achieving the ReImagine Washtenaw vision over time. This can be done effectively if all local governmental partners consistently and methodically implement the provisions of the Study incrementally, as development projects are submitted for redevelopment. The improvements will be made using both private and public funds. For example, typically private developers are asked to provide additional right-of-way, fund reconfigured site access, sidewalks and other streetscape elements as part of the redevelopment of the site. However, it is more likely that public funds would be used to make changes to the road, itself. Given this fact, any attempt to develop an overall cost is not useful and would be speculative.

Question #8

A Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA) was previously suggested as the way to finance corridor improvements. If the City of Ann Arbor adopts this Study, will it require the City to adopt a CIA?

Answer: A CIA is not being proposed at this time. A CIA could be an effective tool to finance future corridor improvements, and was explored in 2011 by the ReImagine Washtenaw partners. In order for such an Authority to be formed, numerous legislative due process steps would need to be taken by the City of Ann Arbor (and any other partnering local unit of government). Adopting the Corridor Improvement Study is not one of those steps.

Question #9

Won't adding bike lanes, sidewalks, and boulevards just slow traffic down and create more congestion?

Answer: While adding a bike lane, in isolation, may have traffic-calming effects, the sum total of all the proposed improvements will be critical in mitigating further congestion in the future. If the Complete Streets vision is implemented, all the benefits of a multi-modal street will be realized, including increased access and mobility, a safer environment for all users, and also moving more people through the corridor, while helping to mitigate an expected traffic increase of between 6% and 12% by 2040. The transportation modeling conducted as part of this Study shows that overall corridor congestion in the City of Ann Arbor could be reduced if all the improvements are implemented (not just physical

improvements, but transit, land use, access, etc.). Conversely, if nothing is done, congestion is likely to increase with projected increases in traffic volumes.

Question #10

Why can't we just add another lane to the corridor? If additional public access is needed, anyway, to provide a Complete Street, isn't just adding a third lane a better solution to traffic congestion?

Answer: Simply expanding the road is an antiquated approach to transportation in a society that is demanding smarter, safer, and more sustainable solutions. 1) The City has adopted a Complete Streets policy, and adding a third lane would not allow for bike lanes or a Complete Street; 2) Adding a third lane does not address the poor pedestrian safety environment. In fact, it would make the corridor even more unsafe for pedestrians; 3) Adding a third lane does not allow for the congestion-reducing advantages of a boulevard with indirect left turns; 4) studies have shown that adding lanes only induces more traffic to be attracted to the corridor; and 5) Adding a third lane would likely require additional public access beyond what is currently proposed as part of the Study, creating additional impacts to adjacent properties.

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